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Along a Distant Arctic Border, Peace Reigns

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KIRKENES, Norway — While ground and air forces of four NATO nations conduct winter war games 300 miles to the west, peace and tranquility prevail at this headquarters of the Norwegian border guards at the Soviet frontier.

Kirkenes, within the Arctic Circle, is Norway's easternmost community near the northern end of the 133-mile-long frontier with the Soviet Union.

Most important, Kirkenes is an intelligence window into the Soviet Union. It adjoins the Kola Peninsula, where the Northern Fleet and 65 percent of the Soviet submarine force are based.

From a border post outside town, the Soviet nickel-mining settlement of Nikel can be seen in the distance. Sixty miles beyond is Murmansk, Russia's ice-free port in the north.

Norwegian authorities are close-mouthed about the intelligence-collection activities that go on here. American intelligence officials visit the area frequently.

Little Activity of Interest

The Russians, too, use their side of the border as a listening post, although there is little visible military activity of interest in northern Norway.

The Norwegian defense of the border is entrusted to a company of hand-

picked conscripts, who serve for nine months in teams of 20 at seven outposts. The border company is backed up by the small Kirkenes garrison, whose largest weapon is a medium-range mortar.

The Norwegians say that the Soviet Union, on its side of the border, keeps 1,000 guards staffing 17 posts, with about 45 men each. The Soviet border guards are part of the K.G.B., the internal security agency.

Relations along the border are good, according to the Norwegian Border Commissioner, Brig. Gen. Inge A. Torhaug, a retired air force intelligence officer.

"The Russians are viewed as liberators in this part of Norway," he said. "You must remember the Germans had a major base here during the war and their rule was very harsh. In 1944, the Russians crossed the border and drove the Germans out. Unlike their behavior on the continent, the Russians deported themselves well here. They shared their bread with the people and when the war ended, the Russians retired behind their own borders."

General Torhaug says local people are wary of the Soviet Government's intentions, but do not fear the Russians only a few miles away.

Both sides patrol on skis in winter and staff watch towers. No fraternization is allowed, nor is any "insulting

behavior" tolerated. If patrols come near one another, the Norwegian and Soviet soldiers are instructed to raise their hands in a non-hostile salute.

Life on Border Called Dull

Life on the border is dull, according to a 21-year-old sergeant at one of the posts. This has not always been the case, General Torhaug said, and there were incidents in the past.

The most serious one occurred in the 1960's, General Torhaug said, when a Soviet armored division unexpectedly pulled up to the border under cover of fog and aimed its weapons at the Norwegians.

The Norwegians took up firing positions, the commissioner said, and the confrontation ended when the Norwegian commissioner sent a message to his Soviet counterpart, and the Russians turned their guns away.

The Norwegian border guards say that most incidents now center on the recovery of Norwegian reindeer or pigs that wander across the border.

A few years ago, as a prank, bored Norwegian soldiers pretended to execute their cook by firing squad in full view of the Soviet troops across the border. As the man was dragged away, the Russians petitioned the Norwegians by message to carry out their disciplinary activities out of view of Soviet soldiers, who the Russians said found the execution upsetting.